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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

## *Ethnic Minorities and Insurgency in Thailand*

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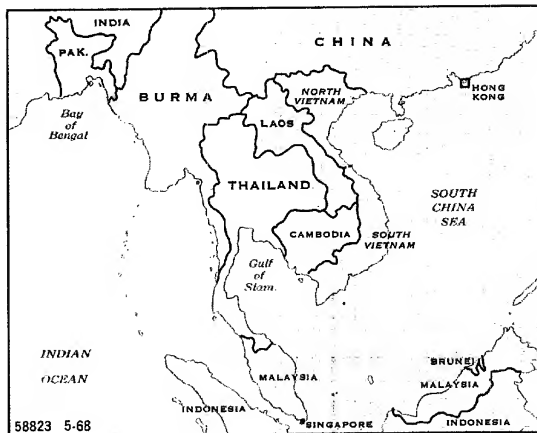
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May 1968  
CIA/BGI GM 68-4

# Ethnic Minorities and Insurgency in Thailand

The major ethnic minorities of Thailand—the Chinese, the Thai Malays, the hill tribes, and the Vietnamese—recently have acquired an enhanced importance to the nation's internal security. Their new significance derives to a large extent from the fact that major concentrations of the minority populations are found in the north, the northeast, west-central Thailand, and the Thailand-Malaysia border areas—where subversive insurgency movements are continuing and, in some cases, appear to be gaining strength.

These minorities together number about 6,200,000 people, about 19 percent of Thailand's estimated total population of 32,939,000. The approximate ethnic composition of the population is indicated in the accompanying *Ethnolinguistic Summary*; areas inhabited by the major ethnic minorities and secondary ethnic components are shown on the accompanying map.



## Chinese

The ethnic Chinese are estimated to number almost 5 million people—about 15 percent of the total population. They are concentrated chiefly in the Bangkok-Thon Buri metropolitan area and in the tin- and rubber-producing areas of peninsular Thailand. Elsewhere they tend to live in towns along transportation arteries. In general, this is the best assimilated Chinese minority in Southeast Asia; friction with the “host” society is minimal, and about 90 percent of all Chinese enjoy full Thai citizenship. Like most Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Chinese of Thailand are chiefly active in commerce, but they also engage in many other endeavors, including government service. Some leading Thai Government personnel, such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Thanat Khoman) and the Minister of National Development (Pote Sarasin), are part Chinese. Chinese who are not citizens of Thailand, however, are excluded from certain jobs and by law they are also forbidden to grow rice.

The Chinese residents of peninsular Thailand are probably the most vulnerable and possibly the most susceptible to subversion. They are the targets of the Communist Terrorist Organization (CTO), the paramilitary arm of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), a remnant of the guerrilla force that provoked the Malayan Emergency (1948-60). After retreating into the Thai border area about 1958, the Communists launched a campaign of intimidation mainly against the Chinese rubber planters and workers and the Chinese village residents in the Betong-Sadao border area. The Communist campaign has quite effectively eliminated opposition in the rural and mountainous areas occupied by the CTO. The 800- to 1,000-man CTO organization, comprised largely of ethnic Chinese, is now attempting to expand its recruitment and propaganda efforts among border residents. CTO success with the older Chinese is based mainly on the threat of coercion; its appeal to youth, however, is more positive. To the latter it promises an appealing way of life, in which one is allowed to rise above the occupational restrictions imposed by the Government.

Another group of Thai Chinese, trained in Communist China or North Vietnam, is active in the insurgency taking place in Nan Province of northern Thailand. Furthermore, Chinese dominate the small illegal Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

## Thai Malays

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According to the 1960 census, there were 1,025,569 Muslims in Thailand (referred to as “Thai Islam” by the Government). Eighty percent of them, about 820,500, are ethnic Malays (Thai Malays) who reside in peninsular Thailand south of Ranong. The concentration of Thai Malays in the five southernmost provinces represents 65 percent of Thailand's total Muslim population and 53 percent of the total population of those provinces. North of the peninsular area the Muslim population includes Pakistani immigrants and descendants of former ethnic Malay slaves and prisoners of war who were moved from the peninsula and resettled in areas chiefly north and east of Bangkok. Smaller groups of Muslims are scattered throughout the country.

The traditional Malay irredentism, the deteriorating economic conditions of the region, and the presence of the CTO in the border area are factors which may serve to alienate some Thai Malays. Until conquered by the Siamese in 1832, the southern provinces comprised the Kingdom of Pattani, one of the largest and most important of the Malay kingdoms. Many Malays in this region are still psychologically oriented toward Malaysia despite Thai Government efforts to achieve their assimilation.

Pan-Malay ideology is reinforced by differences in language and religion. The 1960 census showed that 382,000 of the total population of 697,000, that is 55 percent of the people in the three southernmost provinces, could not speak Thai. Conversely, officers appointed to this area by the Thai Government often cannot speak Malay. Differences in religion are dramatized in the educational field. A parallel system of schools—the Thai public schools and the Muslim religious schools—exists in much of peninsular Thailand. Attendance at the former is resisted by conservative Muslim elements in the villages, who believe that Malay students attending public schools will be contaminated by alien (Buddhist) ideas. A Thai Government program (assisted by the Asia Foundation) to encourage the Muslim religious schools to teach the Thai language and to qualify for recognition by the Education Ministry as legitimate private schools has had some success, and in recent years the proportion of Muslim Malays who speak Thai has been increasing.

Until recently the peninsular region had been a prosperous area, but its economy is now depressed, mainly because of the declining prices of rubber. A large per-

*This memorandum was produced by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence and coordinated with the Offices of Current Intelligence, National Estimates, and Economic Research.*

Ethnolinguistic Summary <sup>a</sup>

Ethnic Group	Population
TAI (THAI) <sup>b</sup>	26,231,300
SINO-TIBETAN	5,214,700
Chinese	4,940,800
Karen <sup>c d</sup>	162,000
Tibeto-Burman <sup>d</sup>	41,800
Lahu (Mussuh) <sup>e</sup>	15,000
Lahu Na (Black Lahu)	3,000
Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) <sup>f</sup>	9,200
Lahu Shi	600
Lahu Shehle	2,200
Lisu (Lishaw, Lissaw)	20,400
Akha (E-Kaw)	6,400
Meo-Yao <sup>d</sup>	70,100
Meo <sup>g</sup>	54,000
H'moong Njua (Blue Meo)	31,200
H'moong Deaw (White Meo)	22,800
Yao	16,100
AUSTROASIATIC	467,400
Mon-Khmer	391,400
Mon	60,000
Khmer (Cambodians)	200,000
Kha Mu (Khmu) <sup>d</sup>	3,300
Htin (Kha Htin, T'in) <sup>d</sup>	18,900
Lawa (Luwa, L'wa) <sup>d</sup>	9,000
Kui (Soai, Kuoy)	100,000
Yumbri (Phi Tong Luang) <sup>d</sup>	200
Vietnamese	75,000
Senoi-Semang	1,000
Semang (Negrito, Ngok, Sakai) <sup>d</sup>	1,000
MALAYO-POLYNESIAN	na
Malay	na
Malays (Thai Malays)	820,500 <sup>h</sup>
Chaonam (Moken)	na

<sup>a</sup> Statistics are estimates from best available sources. All figures are rounded to the closest hundred. Names in parentheses are alternatives.

<sup>b</sup> In some classifications, Tai- and Chinese-speaking peoples are grouped together under the major category SINO-TIBETAN.

<sup>c</sup> The main ethnic divisions of the Karen in northern Thailand are the P'wo (24,000), Skaw or S'gaw (45,000), Taungthu (600), and B'ghwe or Ka Ya (1,300).

<sup>d</sup> Hill tribes.

<sup>e</sup> "Mussuh," used by the Thai for the Lahu, is a Shan word meaning "hunter."

<sup>f</sup> The Lahu Nyi, or Southern Lahu, call themselves Lahu-ya, meaning "Lahu people"; they resent the "Red" designation given them by the Thai, which denotes "rawness" rather than the color of the women's skirts as popularly believed.

<sup>g</sup> The two main groups of Meo are termed Blue and White. The Blue Meo call themselves H'moong Njua and are divided by the Thai into Meo Dawk, Meo Lai, and Meo Dam—Thai for flowery, striped, and black Meo, respectively. The White Meo call themselves H'moong Deaw and are known as Meo Khao by the Thai.

<sup>h</sup> Based on 1960 Thai census.

centage of the rubber trees in this area, where the nation's rubber industry is concentrated, have been tapped for 30 years or more, and as most of them are of a low-yielding variety the tappers' take no longer provides a living wage. Many tappers are leaving their jobs and looking for work elsewhere, but alternative employment is hard to find. Currently one-third of the 3 million people living in peninsular Thailand are directly dependent on rubber for their livelihood. The economic situation is further complicated by a regional deficiency in rice and by the smuggling of some of the available rice into the more profitable Malaysian market. As a consequence, the rice supply is supplemented by costly imports obtained mainly from central Thailand. Economic problems such as these may be capitalized upon by the CTO in its drive to subvert the population.

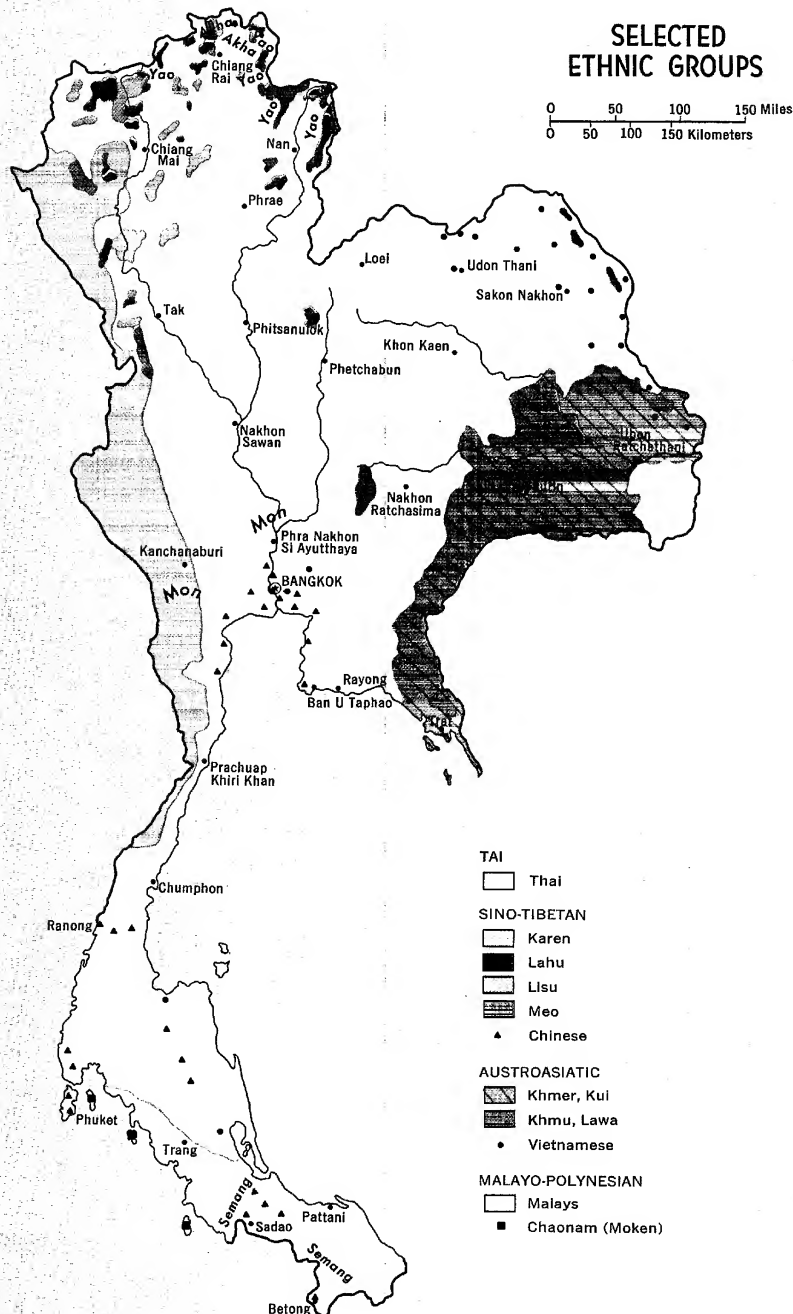
To date, however, the CTO apparently has had difficulty enlisting a following among the Thai Malays. The Malay irredentism, basically a movement that focuses loyalty toward Malaysia, contrasts sharply with the CTO's hostility to the Malaysian Government.

## Hill Tribes

Hill tribesmen, probably numbering over 300,000, are found chiefly in the largely isolated, remote mountainous areas of northern and western Thailand. Ethnically, they are related to peoples in neighboring countries. The Meo of Thailand, for example, are of the same ethnic group as the Meo in Laos, North Vietnam, and southern China.

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The tribes are diverse and do not represent a unified force. Primary loyalty is toward their villages; generally, a larger loyalty that could unify and integrate them within the Thai nation has been lacking. Relations between the tribes, as well as with the lowland Thai, vary so much that it is difficult to generalize about them. The size of the respective hill tribes as shown on the *Ethnolinguistic Summary* is not necessarily a valid indicator of insurgency potential. Some tribes, such as the furtive Yumbri, remain quite aloof from other tribes and the lowland Thai; others, such as the Lahu, have frequent contacts with the Lisu, Akha, and Yao and live with them in reasonable harmony. The Meo and Yao are bold and aggressive in their contacts with the Thai and are frequently seen in lowland towns.

None of the tribes have longstanding traditions of insurgency; rather, their history has been largely one of isolation and minimum contact with the Central Government. All, however, are imbued with the prowess of good hunters and have an intimate knowledge of their mountainous environment—factors that are invaluable in guerrilla warfare. As shown by experience with the Meo of Laos, the tribes fight best when their villages and traditional ways of life are threatened. Over-reaction to incidents of insurgency by Thai authorities, such as the destruction of villages, could conceivably turn tribes against the Bangkok Government, especially as such acts are capitalized on by effective Communist propaganda.



Thai-Malay kampong (village). Houses in coastal kampongs are characteristically built on pilings as a precaution against exceptionally high seas. Coconut trees provide shade, food, drink, and the thatching material used for roofs.

to discredit Hanoi. In the long perspective, attendance of Vietnamese children at Thai public or Catholic parochial schools may be the strongest force for countering the influence of Hanoi. Both school systems are free of Communist influence and instruct only in the Thai language.

In west-central Thailand, successful insurgent ambushes have apparently not been followed up by active recruitment among the local population. Nevertheless, a continuation of hit-and-run tactics by the Communists can probably be expected. Government efforts to thwart insurgents in this area include the planned use of the new Village Security Force (VSF) teams for socioeconomic work as well as the patrol of the coast in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province by Thai Marine Police.

far more vigorous program of planting high-yielding hybrid rubber trees is pursued and the quality of the exportable product is improved. Instead of natural rubber, which is increasingly threatened by synthetic rubber, the Government could encourage the planting of coconut and oil palms. Based on Malaysian experience this alternative appears practical.

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The Government's efforts to assimilate the Malays in the peninsular area have been successful to a degree; the well-coordinated Thai Army Mobile Development Unit (MDU) programs appear to be the most promising. (The MDU program is often followed by the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) program. Instituted in 1964, ARD provides a vehicle for accelerated, sustained follow-up to MDU area operations and represents a coordinated and concentrated programing of all rural development efforts in critical areas.) Generally, however, the Muslims still live on the fringes of Thai society and have little hope of advancing socially or economically beyond the confines of their own villages. The rural Chinese are even less assimilated. Furthermore, the Government as yet has no real regional program to deal with the peninsula's growing economic problems; its attempts to increase rice production in order to reduce the region's dependence on outside sources have met with only partial success. These projects are closed both to the alien Chinese, who are forbidden by law to grow rice, and to the Muslims, who cannot resettle in the parts of the provinces of Narathiwat and Yala that are being developed for the ethnic Thai. Rubber planters will be unable to compete successfully in international trade unless a

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White Meo woman collecting raw opium. A tribal family that cultivates poppy typically produces some 8 pounds of opium annually, which is sold for about 3000 baht (\$150 US).

Until relatively recent years the policy of the Thai Government has been to generally ignore the hill tribes. The 1960 census did not even include them. In turn, the tribal people, especially those engaged in growing opium, did not appreciate Government interference. However, the border areas, particularly in the north, are important strategically, and securing and maintaining the loyalty of the hill tribes is vital to the Government's ability to cope with increasingly aggressive Communist activities.

The longstanding antipathy between the hill tribes and the lowland peoples, as well as certain traditional characteristics of tribal agriculture (that is, the slash-and-burn clearing of fields and cultivation of the opium poppy), are impediments to the improvement of Government-tribal relations. Tribal field-clearing techniques have destroyed significant areas of forest, and this process, in turn, has allegedly lowered the watertable in the rice-growing lowlands. The cultivation of the opium poppy, the chief source of cash for many tribes, was declared illegal by the 1959 Opium Law. In September 1967, the Director General of the Thai Department of Public Welfare stated that the Government continued to advocate the "preservation of forest resources and the elimination of poppy cultivation." Cutting trees without permission is a jailable offense. Thus, to the Government, deforestation is a crime, but to the hill tribes it is still a way of life. In effect, the tribes are being told that their traditional customs are now illegal.

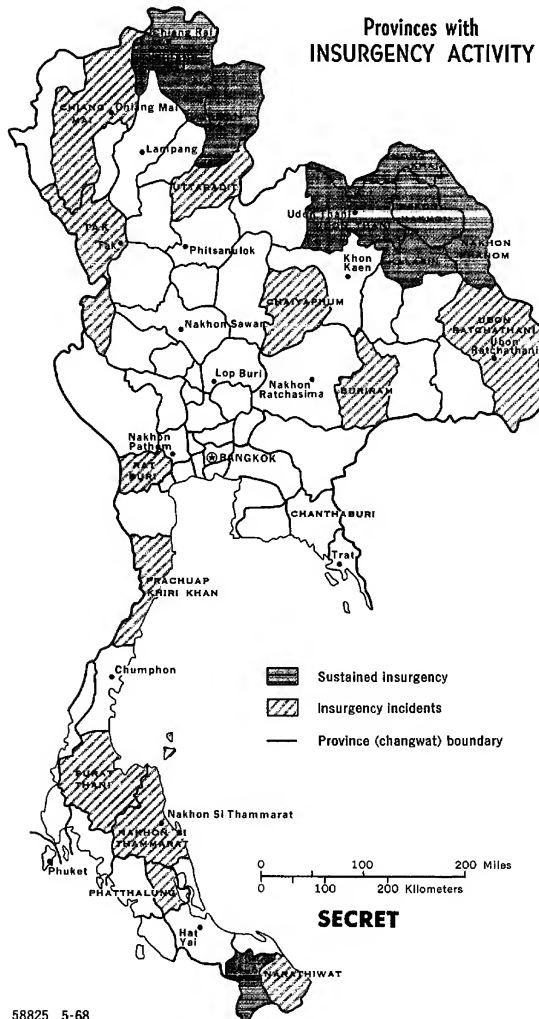
Communist propaganda cadres appeal to the Meo hill tribes by promising that the Communists will establish a "Meo Kingdom" in which the Meo will be equal and not subservient to the Thai. They have also stated that the Meo will be allowed to cut down as many trees as they like to expand their ricefields and to cultivate as much opium as they wish. The success of this propaganda

offensive is problematical. Mistreatment of the hill tribes by Thai officials, as well as Communist propaganda, has undoubtedly caused tribal disaffection. Whatever the reason, Meo and other tribesmen have been attracted in significant numbers to the Communist-controlled insurgency in Nan Province in northern Thailand. Also, some Karen tribesmen are probably involved in the insurgent activity in west-central Thailand.

#### Vietnamese

The immigration of Vietnamese into Thailand has been going on since the early 1800's. Those who arrived prior to 1940 and their descendants are termed the "Old Vietnamese." Most of these, descendants of Christians who fled persecution in Vietnam, are in Chanthaburi and Sakon Nakhon provinces and some are in the Bangkok area. Many of the Old Vietnamese are Thai citizens.

Some 75,000 Vietnamese refugees, fleeing the Indochina war, entered Thailand between 1946 and 1954. The majority were welcomed by Thai authorities and settled in the northeast provinces. Later, however, as the pro-Communist character of their leadership became apparent, the Thai Government became apprehensive and decided to repatriate the group. In 1959, over 70,000 Vietnamese registered to return to North Vietnam, and by the end of July 1962, almost 36,000 had been repatriated. The repatriation was halted in August 1964 at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, with Hanoi alleging that navigation in the gulf was no longer safe.



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Current estimates of the number of Vietnamese in Thailand vary from 40,000 to over 75,000. A 1967 estimate by a Bangkok staff member of the Advanced Research Projects Agency, US Department of Defense, indicates the main groups comprising the Vietnamese community, as follows:

Refugees still registered for repatriation .....	36,437
Children born to refugee parents, 1964-67 (based on assumption of 3 percent net increase per annum) ..	5,153
Registered aliens .....	3,160
Unregistered refugees and others who entered Thailand illegally (based on Thai press reports) .....	10,000
Old Vietnamese .....	20,000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>74,750</b>

Few of the Vietnamese residents of Thailand have been directly involved in insurgency in the northeast (most of the insurgents are ethnic Thai). However, some of the key members of the outlawed CPT, who were arrested in August 1967, were Thai citizens of Vietnamese descent. One Vietnamese was believed to be the top coordinator of Communist activities in northeast Thailand.

Communist cadres established early control over the Vietnamese refugees by means of physical violence and intimidation. Many Vietnamese, however, are voluntarily oriented toward Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh is revered by them as a great patriot. The Communists also maintain control through a number of clandestine associations within the Vietnamese community. Currently, these associations appear to be directed by the Lao Dong (Workers) Party in North Vietnam. Orders originating in Hanoi are apparently transmitted via the North Vietnamese Embassy in Vientiane, Laos.

#### Trends and Counterinsurgency Efforts

All the major areas of insurgency in Thailand at present are frontier regions that have significant concentrations of non-Thai peoples. In northern Thailand, active insurgency prevails in the hill tribe areas of Nan and Chiang Rai provinces. Sweep operations by the army in these areas have apparently been ineffective, and little progress has been made against insurgent bands. However, casualties among Government forces have continued to mount. In these actions the forced evacuation and occasional destruction of villages have further exacerbated Thai-tribal relations.

A comprehensive program of economic and social assistance will be needed to prevent subversion of the tribes over the long term. To this end, plans called for the initiation of an "0910"-style operation in northern Thailand in early February 1968. It was to be modeled after the 0910 plan (name derived from the 1966-67 lunar calendar year 2509-10) developed and used originally in the northeast by the Counter Subversion Operations Command (CSOC), which was established in late 1965 to coordinate the countersubversion efforts of all Thai Government agencies. The 1968 plan called for the installation of joint police and Volunteer Defense Corps (VDC) security teams, comprised of lowland Thai, in Chiang Rai Province hill tribe villages, the objective being to improve living conditions and deny Communist access to the tribal population. These teams, however, have been reassigned for the time being to duty outside the immediate operational areas where Thai security forces have initiated clearing actions.

The delay in using the teams as originally planned may be due in part to a change in counterinsurgency responsibility that has occurred within the Thai Government. Initially, the senior command structure of CSOC incorporated extremely high-level Royal Thai Army (RTA) and Ministry of Interior representation. At its lower operational echelons, CSOC was in principle a civilian entity. However, since December 1967, operational responsibility for counterinsurgency has been vested in the RTA regional military commanders operating under conditions of martial law. This has resulted in a noticeably greater stress on the primacy of military suppression operations. It is unlikely that civic action programs will receive strong advocacy from the RTA.

Although the insurgency in northeast Thailand was at a reduced level during late 1967 and early 1968, the insurgent potential in this region is still the strongest in the country. The Communists have an estimated hard core strength of 1,500 guerrillas. To date, Thai military operations have been unable either to destroy armed insurgent units or to permanently displace them from established base areas. The Communists, however, have failed thus far to gain wide acceptance among the rural population.

A number of suspected Vietnamese Communists have been arrested in the northeast, and they are being detained for possible "repatriation" to South Vietnam. During the recent "Tet" (New Year) season, the Thai Government launched its first Vietnamese-Thai language radio broadcast information program in an effort designed

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Clearing landing strip for light aircraft in remote, mountainous area of north Thailand. Such improvements in transportation help the Government to carry out counterinsurgency programs among the tribal minorities. Scars of tribal agricultural plots, cleared by slash-and-burn techniques, are visible on the mountains in the background.

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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PROJECT PROPOSAL	RESEARCH ACTIVITY NOTICE
SUBJECT		PROJECT NUMBER
Thailand's Ethnic Minorities		61.2376
REQUESTER		SUBJECT CODE
Self-initiated		
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM		REQUESTING OFFICE
<p>To prepare a Geographic Intelligence Memorandum that will present a concise treatment of essential background information concerning the significant ethnic minority groups within Thailand. This proposal is stimulated by the continuing U. S. policy-level interest in insurgency in Thailand -- not only in the Northeast, which has been the subject of rather close attention for several years, but also in the increasingly active North and in the Thailand - Malaysia border region. The proposed GM will treat the Chinese, the Thai-Malays, the hill tribes, and the Vietnamese as ethnic minorities within Thailand and will briefly discuss cultural and geo-economic factors that might influence the potential participation of the respective groups in insurgency/counterinsurgency activities.</p>		TARGET DATE
		Feb 1968
		ANALYST/BRANCH
		GD/F
		EST. ANALYST MANHOURS
		100 25X1A
<p>It is planned to include a recompiled ethnic map and a graphic ethnic summary, both already essentially completed; these should be valuable complements to the most recent (1952) edition of NIS Section 42 for Thailand.</p>		25X1C
COORDINATION REQUIRED FROM		
CD/BI : Preparation of map.		
OTHER CIA: DDP, OCI, ONE for coordination.		
NON-CIA : State for coordination.		
APPROVED		25X1A
<p>319-68</p> <p>DATE</p>		<p>Acting</p> <p>CHIEF, Geography Division/OBGI</p> <p>DATE 30Jan68</p>

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9 April 1968

GM - Thailand

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**Preliminary Schedule**

Text

8-9-10 April  
11 April  
12 April  
12-15 April  
17 April

- Coordination
- Typing
- To CD/BGI (including photos)
- To PSD for linotype
- Linotype to CD/T —

*2 May 68*

Maps, Photos,  
etc.

8-16 April  
17 April  
17-22 April  
23-24 April

- Compilation
- Preparation of Dummy
- Drafting
- CD/BGI map check (including map and text assembly)

25 April  
26 April  
3 May  
6 May

- Final wrap-up meeting
- GM to PSD
- GM printed and approved
- GM disseminated

Date GM to be disseminated depends on whether or not photos will be printed in full color. Add 5 days for color.

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